

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

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SUBJECT: EDITORIAL ON AID FOR CAMBODIA

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF LEAD EDITORIAL IN WASHINGTON POST
FEBRUARY 5. BEGIN TEXT. MR. FORD'S REQUEST FOR TWO HUN-
DRED TWENTY-TWO MILLION DOLLARS MORE IN MILITARY AID FOR
CAMBODIA MAKES IT NECESSARY TO RECALL THE BASIC AMERICAN
GOAL THERE. IT IS THE LIMITED AND SIMPLE ONE OF HELPING
KEEP THE PHNOM PENH GOVERNMENT AFLOAT UNTIL THE KHMER ROUGE
INSURGENTS AGREE TO SIT DOWN AND NEGOTIATE SOME KIND OF
SETTLEMENT WITH IT. PRESIDENT LON NOL IS NO NGUYEN VAN
THIEU. HE IS DEMONSTRABLY AS EAGER AS THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE
LEADER IS RELUCTANT TO FIND A NEGOTIATED WAY OUT OF HIS
COUNTRY'S PREDICAMENT. FAR FROM RESISTING THE POLITICAL
COMPROMISES CALLED FOR IN AN INTERNATIONAL ACCORD HE HAS
SIGNED, LON NOL HAS LONG BEEN ON RECORD AS OFFERING UNCON-
DITIONAL NEGOTIATIONS. HIS ADVERSARIES, HOWEVER, HAVE
SPURNED HIS EVERY OFFER. THEY DO NOT WANT TO SHARE POWER,
EVEN TEMPORARILY, BUT TO HAVE IT ALL. THEY ARE TRYING NOW
TO CUT OFF ALL SUPPLIES COMING INTO PHNOM PENH.

NOW, GIVEN THE DESTRUCTIVENESS OF THE WAR IN CAMBODIA, A
POWERFUL ARGUMENT CAN BE MADE THAT IT IS MORE URGENT TO
"PUT THE COUNTRY OUT OF ITS MISERY"-- BY CUTTING OFF AID
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TO ITS GOVERNMENT -- THAN TO HELP IT REMAIN AFLOAT. THE RELATIVE GEOPOLITICAL UNIMPORTANCE OF CAMBODIA TO THE UNITED STATES REINFORCES THIS ARGUMENT. THERE ARE EVEN SOME AMERICAN OFFICIALS WHO WOULD RECOMMEND OR COUNTENANCE THE ENDING OF AID TO CAMBODIA -- ON GROUNDS THAT MILITARILY LONG TERM'S FALL WOULD GIVE VIETNAM'S COMMUNISTS NO ADVANTAGE THEY DO NOT ALREADY ENJOY AND POLITICALLY IT MIGHT MAKE IT EASIER FOR THE ADMINISTRATION TO WIN CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR SAIGON. IF CAMBODIA IS TO BE "PUT OUT OF ITS MISERY" HOWEVER, THIS SHOULD RESULT FROM A DECISION BY CAMBODIANS, NOT AMERICANS. THE GOVERNMENT'S FORCES ARE, AFTER ALL, FIGHTING, NOT SURRENDERING. CORRUPT AS THAT GOVERNMENT MAY BE, IT STILL IS SUPPORTED BY MANY CAMBODIANS. THEY PREFER, OR ACCEPT, THE MISERY THEY KNOW TO THE ALTERNATIVE OF A KHMER ROUGE TAKEOVER.

THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAS MADE A STRONG CASE FOR EVERY PENNY OF THE EXTRA TWO HUNDRED TWENTY-TWO MILLION DOLLARS. INDEED, NEWS REPORTS FROM PHNOM PENH INDICATE A RANGE OF JUDGMENTS THERE ABOUT WHETHER A SHORTFALL WOULD BE A MILITARY OR PSYCHOLOGICAL DISASTER, OR WHETHER IT WOULD JUST REQUIRE MORE STRINGENT RATIONING OF ARTILLERY AMMUNITION. IN ANY EVENT, WHILE THE FIGURE IS DEBATABLE AND WILL SURELY BE DEBATED, THE CONGRESS SHOULD BE CONSIDERING WHAT POLITICAL MESSAGE IT WISHES TO SEND AS WELL. THAT MESSAGE SHOULD BE, WE BELIEVE, THAT THE UNITED STATES WILL SUPPORT -- IN WAYS LIMITED STRICTLY TO MATERIAL AID, AS DISTINCT FROM ACTIVE MILITARY PARTICIPATION -- AN EMBATTLED FRIENDLY GOVERNMENT WHICH IS MAKING A REASONABLE EFFORT TO RESOLVE ITS CONFLICT BY PEACEFUL MEANS.

2. SUGGEST EMBASSY PASS TO GKR AND AMBASSADOR UM SIM, KISSINGER

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